Background

- Parents were: Benjamin Ives Spock and Mildred Louise (Stoughton) Spock
- Benjamin Spock was the oldest of 6 and he helped take care of his younger siblings
- Benjamin Spock was born May 2, 1903 in New Haven, Connecticut
- Ben and siblings; Hiddy, Betty, Anne, Bobby, and Sally were raised according to Pediatrician Luther Emmett Holt and mostly his mother’s instincts
  - Holt was leading exert of the time
Spock’s Childhood/ Adolescence

- Father was loving and affectionate towards sisters but remained distant from Spock and his brother.
- Mildred was the disciplinary parent where the father was more passive.
- Public schools were not important until age 7.
  - Mildred homeschooled instead for 2 years then gave up.
  - Spock went to 3rd grade at Worthington Hooker.
- Mildred placed Hiddy and Spock in “fresh air school”.
- Then Hopkin’s Grammar school.
- At 12, Ben, attended Hamden Hall.
- At 16, Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts.
- Attended Yale in fall 1921.
Ben’s father attended Yale and he promised himself to surpass his father’s achievements.

During summer before Yale, Spock was a counselor at a young boy’s camp in Long Island.

Ben had to stay at home his freshman year because of Mildred fearing he would those morals.

Summer of 1921 Spock took a job as a counselor to children stricken with polio in Newington, Connecticut.

Ben joined rowing team and took enough science classes to get into medical school.

Met Jane Cheney.

He attended Yale Medical and moved back home while in med school.

Planned to marry Jane.
  - Married in spring on 1926
  - 350 guests at wedding.
After Yale

- Jane and Ben moved to New York where he finished school at Colombia’s College of Physicians and Surgeons
- Graduated from Colombia in 1929
- Ben received a 2 year internship at Presbyterian Hospital
  - Became interested in emotional makeup and how it affected patient’s well-being
  - Wasn’t paid so Jane worked as research assistant for Dr. George Draper
- Ben became interested in Freud’s theories of emotional development and how it might apply to his work as a Pediatrician
- Jane left work with Draper because of its emotional toll on her and became a saleswoman at Macy’s
The Beginning of Practicing Medicine

- 1931 - Spock started a 1 year internship in pediatric training at New York Nursery and Child’s Hospital
  - Spock developed a reputation for spending time with mothers and freely answering questions about everyday matters, often putting their mind at ease
  - Thumb sucking disagreement
    - Went along with because he was just an intern
    - To question advice would be going against the wisdom of the day
- Ben realized how much Freud could apply to his own work
  - Unsure of himself he treaded carefully
- Spock would become 1st American Pediatrician to have a double residency in both pediatrics and psychiatry
- 1932 - Accepted 1 year internship at Cornell’s new Payne Whitney Clinic, located at New York Hospital
- 1933 - Finished residency and opened up his own small clinic on the East side returning fully to Pediatrics
Since many of life's psychological problems begin in childhood, he believed a Pediatrician trained in Freud’s theories could do many great things.

Spock explored the emotional stages that children go through, how they become attached to their parents, why some feel angry of rivalrous.

Also became fascinated with Freud explanations of phobias, anxieties, dream images, and theories of penis envy.

Ben thought Freud was “a very wise and highly intuitive person.”

With the help of Caroline B. Zachry he was able to translate Freud’s theories into everyday advice.
Late 1930s and early 1940s - Ben's private pediatric patients were from highly educated, upper-middle-class families in Manhattan's finest neighborhoods.

Because of his psychiatric background many mothers referred to him as a “special baby doctor”

- Rarely disappointing them

Urged parents to call him if they had concerns without charge

Jane and Ben were still relying on Jane’s family allowance to make ends meet

Long hours were putting a strain on marriage especially Jane’s patience

- Ben believed “the doctor must respond to patient’s needs and that took precedence over the family.”

1937 Spock became board certified in Pediatrics but never went for Psychiatry.
The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care

- Doubleday Book Publishers made an offer to Spock in 1938 but he was not ready to write
- Late 1941 - Spock put his ideas into a book
- Jane more than anyone encouraged him and offered to help him
- Donald Geddes (editor of Pocket Books) made an offer
- Hardcover edition was later published by Charles Duell, of Duell, Sloan and Pearce
- Spock accepted no money in advance for project and only a small percentage on his royalties
507 sections each with their own headings

“Trust yourself”

Reassuring parents that they know more than they think and tried to build up the confidence of parents (mostly mothers) who believe they weren’t up for the task of raising a child

One specific section titled “Things You Will Need”

Total revisions = 7

Some beliefs:

- Babies are born to be reasonable and friendly human beings
- Physical discipline isn’t effective
- Children might better deal with short natural outbursts of anger from a parent than the “nagging” approach parents use to make the child feel guilty
Big Changes for Benjamin Spock’s Family

- 1944 (WWII)- Ben was enlisted as a U.S Navy Lieutenant Commander
- Gave up private practice
- Started teaching in 1946
- By 1947 nearly 750,000 copies of the book were sold
- Life in Minnesota
  - Worked along side Aldrich and Helmholtz while at Mayo Clinic
- Spock’s first research
- 1951- move to Pittsburg
The 1950s

- Spock proved to be wise, kind, wholesome, and pure to mothers
- Pittsburg offered a new beginning once again
- He taught preventative psychiatry to medical students, nurses, and other pediatricians
- Worked with children at the University’s Arsenal Health Center
- Book “Baby Bible”
  - Made a penny for every copy sold
  - 1946-1953 made only $37,000 for more than 5 million copies sold and made 23,000 on hardcover
  - 1 in 5 American mothers had Dr Spock’s book
- Jane’s mental breakdown
- Creation of Spock Project Inc
  - Had two tv programs
1954- 2 additional books “A Baby’s First Year” and “Feeding Your Child and Baby”

Spock took on more administrative duties at the University of Pittsburg

- Resigning after opposition from Dr. Brosin (Psychiatry department chair) and confrontation with the vice chancellor of Medical affairs

Spock once again started over at the age of 50

1957 revision of book
Spock in the 1960s

- Baby and Child Care book had been translated into more than 12 languages
- Spock’s sense of self-assurance had given him a sense of public duty
  - Spock realized his popularity could bring some important societal changes to benefit children
- Taught child development at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio
  - Child rearing Studies
  - Lectures covered topics that were rarely mentioned in medical training yet were fundamental
- Spock believed that too many doctors were ill-equipped to listen and respond to their patients’ needs
- Ben was seen as an “outsider” because of his concerns in problems of a normal child and psychological health VS abnormal diseases (other pediatricians at time)
Transition to Political/Social Activism (1960s)

- Began making connection between Pediatrics and Politics
- Political interests became public when he appeared in John F Kennedy’s (JFK) campaign ad
  - Memorable experience for Ben
- 1962 - Spock realized there wouldn’t be peace unless people demanded it
  - Informed parents about risk of nuclear testing
- Joined the SANE board (National Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy) at 60 years old
  - Used Spock’s fame to help advertise and get supporters
Jane supported Spock no matter how poorly she felt or how much emotional strain she experienced.

Mike’s view—“I never seemed good enough, Ben was overcritical and not thoughtful.” Mike believed Ben’s book was little resemblance of him at home.

John’s view—“Ben was a scary person, not physically but always being judgmental and constantly monitoring my behavior.”

Ben considered himself strict, though not harsh or rigid: loving parents involved in formation of his sons’ characters.

Mike Spock was brought up the old-fashioned way and John was brought up by Ben Spock’s book.
Social Activism

- 1st peace demonstration was Easter weekend of 1962
  - Was to stop arms testing

- Spock relied on the white house to help push the social programs he believed were in the best interest of children
  - Endorsed Medicare in 1962

- Served on National Committee of Physicians Supporting Medicare

- JFK used Spock for public relation purposes
  - Spock was good for getting votes from parents but Kennedy’s aides did not take him serious as a foreign policy adviser
Continued

- 1963 JFK was assassinated
  - Spock testified in the Congress for Medicare
  - Voted cochairman of SANE with H. Stuart Hughes (Harvard professor)
- Lyndon B Johnson as president
  - Spock genuinely believed he was interested in civil rights and ending poverty (The Great Society Programs)
    - Spock witnessed the Head Start Program and praised Johnson for it
  - Spock appeared in television and radio commercials for him
  - Rumors about Spock being nominated as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare
Outrage by Johnson

- February 1965 - Johnson bombed North Vietnam which escalated in the Vietnam war
  - Ben felt betrayed and fool for trusting Johnson
- March 1965 - Ben wrote a letter in opposition of war to Johnson
- Ben devoted himself to the antiwar cause
- SANE turned into peace group
- Fall 1965 - large peace movement in Washington, Spock was a main speaker
- November 1965 - largest rally against the Vietnam war
- Back in Cleveland Spock was scorn for his opposition against the war
- 1966 - Spock ruled out race for the US Senate seat
- 1967 Spock “retired” and left Western Reserve University
After Retirement

- Jane looked forward to time with her husband and knew his retirement wouldn’t last long considering his involvement in peace activism
- November 1967 - partnered up with Martin Luther King Jr after being turned down by other to end the war
- Cochairmen of National Conference of New Politic (NCNP) with MLK Jr
- Summer 1967 - Gave up chair position of SANE and focused on NCNP
- Spock became convinced to engage in resistance and threat of federal prosecution was real
- December 1967 - Spock is arrested for civil disobedience
Spock on Trial

- 1968- Ben was indicted along with 5 others
  - Leonard Boudin was his attorney
  - SANE and other groups tried to raise money for the defense
- Charged with conspiring to counsel evasion of the draft
- America was more shocked about his behavior than sympathetic
- John Wall was the prosecutor of the trial
- Ramsey Clark was the attorney general
- Indictment wouldn’t have occurred if Johnson hadn’t approved it
- Found guilty!
- Could remain free on personal recognizance bond of $1000 until appeals
Spock toured the country speaking to dozens of campuses and peace rallies
1969- attacks on Spock were made blaming him for the youths rebellion
Newsweek- named Spock 1 of 6 most influential men of his time, “Father of permissiveness”
Nixon became president
July 1969- the charge of federal conspiracy had been thrown out!
Spock in the 1970s

- Mike Spock in 1968 about his father’s lack of affection growing up, in *Ladies Home Journal*
- Spock and his family started going to therapy
- Spock tried to lobby for intellectual advantaged groups
- Spock was still good natured and had a gentle sense of humor
- 1972- Spock was cochairmen of People’s Party and candidate for President!
  - Refused to drop out even though he had no ambition for becoming president
  - Name appeared on ballots in 10 states
1970s continued

- Ben allied “hippies” due to their support of him
- Feminists like Gloria Steinem attacked Spock about his writing being sexist, and psychologically damaging
- 1975- Jane and Ben divorced after 48 years of marriage
- 1976- 4th edition of Baby and Child Care appeared in bookstores
- 1975- met Mary Morgan
  - Relationship started in December of 1975 on Spock’s trip to San Francisco
Mary Morgan and More…

- Received criticism of their relationship because of the age gap (40 years)
- Proposed and then got married in October of 1976
- Spock and Mary both worked for the People’s Party
  - Spock was the Vice President
- Spock didn’t feel the need to travel as much as he had in the past
- Mary and Ben were social activist together
Baby and Child Care Critics up to the 80s

- 1946 - 1st significant milestone of the generation
- 1960s - book was permissive
- Late 1970s - about self-absorbed hedonism of baby boomers (Me decade)
- 1980s - became model for self-help books and expert guides
  - Paved the way for a generation ready to explore emotional realms of “inner child” and codependency
1980s

- Spock is nearly 80 years old
- 1981 - stood outside White House to protest Ronald Reagan’s plan to cut social programs for the poor and elderly
  - Protest went on for 24 straight days
- Since 1960s Benjamin Spock has been arrested more than 20 times
- Spock recruited Michael Rothenberg, Seattle Pediatrician to continue his work after he passes
- Peter Spock (Mike’s second oldest) committed suicide on Christmas Eve of 1983
- 1985 edition of Baby and Child Care Book
1980s continued

- Jane Spock (1st wife) had 2nd mental collapse in mid 80s
  - Forced her into a psych ward but didn’t tell anyone
- Jane Spock died June 10th in 1989
  - Didn’t want Ben to see her at the end of her life
- Family blamed Ben for not giving her help with mental health sooner
- 1986 Ben trained and entered a rowing contest in Tortola, British Foreign Islands
- Mary wrote autobiography about Spock, “Spock on Spock”
Benjamin Spock in late 1980s-1990s

- 1987 - collapsed passing through Copley Plaza in Boston and suffered a stroke
- 1991 - series of infections, chronic cough, and his legs could no longer hold him
  - Macrobiotic diet
- SANE dedicated its building to be renamed “Ben Spock Center for Peace”
- At 95, Spock still edited and oversaw each word of his books
- 1994 Newsweek - Most Influential American Alive
- 1998 - dies in La Jolla, California
Spock’s Ideals that Changed Parenting

- Trust Your Instincts
- Routines are nice, but babies don’t need a strict regimen
- Don’t Fret if babies act funny; Freud can explain it
- Ideas about good parenting change all the time
- Babies need LOVE!!

Discussion Questions

Why do you think so many people who admired Benjamin Spock quickly turned their backs on him when he spoke out about his political beliefs?

In your opinion, what was Spock’s biggest impact on American Society?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gZ3EzRFQi4